

We Are Worth The Risk by Lexialexus

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Summary:

Steve Harrington comes from a ragtag, outcast, uninteresting, group of friends who all fit their factions poorly. He wears the Erudite blue grudgingly. It just doesn't fit him. From the brains his father tried to beat into him to the anger his mother couldn't draw out of him, he never fit. The Harrington name was on his shoulders, something his father -- an Erudite leader -- often reminded him of.

When the aptitude test comes along, Steve is horrified of what he would get. Somewhere along the way he had all but convinced himself he could pick up a book and fit the perfect outline his father always wanted him to be. When his test reads Dauntless, the faction of the reckless, he feels his life shift. It is not a surprise, as it should be. Steve fit Dauntless so well.

Steve knew Billy Hargrove before joining Dauntless. The school bully had always been a prick in Steve's spine, drawing a lot of anger from Steve in the years they had been forced to sit by each other in English class to 'learn to get along. When they meet in the Dauntless compound, however, something seems different. It is not the hot fire of anger that Steve feels warm his skin around Hargrove.

1. Senior year

Author's Note:

Hey! Thank you so much for reading and I hope you enjoy this random fic that I had to write. So it really isn't needed for you to read *Divergent* or watch *Stranger Things* to understand this story, I hope, but if I did a poor job explaining the world of *Divergent* please tell me! I want you guys to understand the faction system and everything at least a little to make the story enjoyable.

People used to tell the story of his world in a fairy tale. It started with “once upon a time” and end with smiles and laughs and good feelings. For the longest time, Steve was happy about his history. Everyone else was, so why wouldn't he be? When he would imagine the founding story he would envision his mother's smiling face and his dad's blue glasses placed on his small nose. They were good memories, every single one of them. It was his childhood.

Unfortunately, that is all the story was; his childhood. Fairy tales are little more than lies parents tell their children to make them feel better about the world. The smile left his mother's face when she told him the stories of the city, when he was older. His father would no longer look him in the eye when he described scenes of war that brought the whole world to its knees. Happy memories of bedtime stories and history disappeared into dust, replaced with scenes of violence and mayhem that laid the foundation of everything Steve saw today.

“Five factions. Born of dust and ashes.” Steve mutters under his breath, his eyes downcast. He could see his hands, pale and lifeless against the bright blue of his sleeve. The knuckles were starch white, a shade that fit against the porcelain sink he was gripping between them.

“Abnegation. The selfless.” Steve sees one of his closest friends in his mind. Her brown hair slicked back and stuck inside an ugly grey hairband. Blue eyes dull against the same formless grey dress she

wears day after day. Even her sharp jawline dulls under the faint glow of her greyness. The one time Steve had seen her wear something different -- one of his blue jackets on a cold winter night -- she had seemed a star in the night. Her smile wide and bright and everything Steve could ever hope.

“Dauntless. The brave.” This time it is the school bully that slips into his mind. Usually, he is seen leaning against one wall or the other; a shadow amongst the rest of the crowd. His blue eyes are piercing, even amongst a hundred others. When he catches your eye you can feel the whole gaze down your spine. The man is all leather jackets and black jeans that cup his ass far too tight. His stride is quick and careful, meant to draw the attention of anyone else in the room. And draw attention he did, all blonde curly hair that flows in the wind. Steve was sure that hair was the longest he had ever seen on a man. It was one of those styles that made every other man in a mile radius want the same haircut. Or it was that smile that made him so appealing. That lopsided, perfect dimple smile. Even as a shadow against the crowd that smile did something to a room. Something Steve had always envied.

“Amity. The peaceful.” Another one of his best friends comes to mind. Bright colors and smiles were what they were known for, but his friend was anything but. Even the brown hair didn’t fit his faction, but, somehow, he fit in for some reason. The bright red color he wore stood out against everyone else, an eyesore to most. It brought out the tanned tilt to his friend’s skin and fit the color of the endless apples he always carried with him in his pockets. Those apples were the best Steve had ever tasted in his life. Even the fancy dinners his parents brought him along to did nothing in comparison to those fruits. His friend always said it was because peace made them, not competition.

“Candor. The honest.” A child comes to the front of the mind. He had never gotten along with Candor. Their unending bluntness and look of superiority always rubbed Steve the wrong way. But one of the kids he was known to babysit sometimes -- not that anyone knew this -- made friends with a Candor. The kid always had something to say and truth to speak that would be heard if nothing else. Even at such a young age, he wore a suit much like the one Steve himself wore,

except for the colors of course. Half of the suit the kid wore was black, the other white. It switched when it got to his pants, giving him a very interesting look. He was the only one Steve knew of who did this with his pants. The kid seemed happy about it so who was he to judge?

“Erudite. The intelligent.” Steve looks up at himself in the mirror. A stranger looks back at him. His hair is slicked back out of his face, all but one strand that refused to go back with gel. His suit, all bright blue and obnoxious, made the whites and blacks of the bathroom seem dull and unimportant. Everything about Steve’s outfit called attention to the fact that he was an erudite, something he had always hated. Even his undershirt was that repulsive royal blue he had always worn. It made his skin seem pale and sickly and his brown eyes boring and uniform. It made him an erudite.

He was supposed to be smart. He was supposed to have shelves and shelves of books lining his bedroom, all read and put back in order. That’s how his parent’s rooms were. That is how all his friend’s rooms are. Steve was supposed to be in academic clubs and tutor and give speeches about the importance of calculus and algebra. Instead, he snuck out on the roof of his school to avoid the big tests in his math classes. Steve was supposed to be like his father. He was nothing like the man.

Steve turns away from the grimy mirror he had spent far too long staring at. The bathroom was stuffy and claustrophobic on a good day. Today was not a good day. Every step he took led to the sick feeling of his suit pulling against sweaty skin. Beads of sweat drip down from his forehead and into his eyes, causing a small sting he would try and wipe away and fail. The summer air was not something anyone in this school enjoyed.

The grimy bathroom door swung open to a grimy hallway. Its color scheme was a little better than the bathrooms, with a nice blue stripe running along the middle of the walls in a straight line. Every so often it would break into big block letters. ‘Property of faction Erudite’ the wall read. And it was. This high school was only five minutes from Steve’s own house, to the left of the broken-down city the factions found themselves in. It was huge with wide windows and blue doorways. Staffed with teachers all in blue with those cocky

smiles all Erudite seemed to wear like a token. Erudite did all the public education in the city.

That fairy tale was real, to some extent. Everyone here lives in an old city, a broken city torn apart by years and years of war. Their ancestors a long time ago had run from the war and the fighting and the wounds it left behind. A huge wall had been built around the city even as bombs rained from the sky like water droplets in a storm. Heroes had closed off their world from the wartorn country around them and, when the dust cleared, this city was all that remained of humankind. Everyone else had blown themselves up with bombs or shot themselves full of lead. This city, these factions, were the last living pocket of human society left. Factions were born to prevent any more conflict. It was as simple as that.

Steve's shoes click against the floor when he steps out onto the tile. He twists his head around looking for his friends, who had promised to wait on him before heading to lunch. They were leaning against a wall with an apple each, their gaze hanging on each other as if they were the only ones alive. One of them, Nancy, laughs at something the other, Jonathan, had said. Her shoulders shake with the effort of it. Steve is struck by the simple beauty she presents herself with. Even with all that grey, she is still the prettiest woman he has ever seen.

"Ready for lunch?" Steve calls out to the pair. It seems to startle the two out of their little world, as both Jonathan and Nancy's head jerk in his direction. Jonathan pushes off the wall, his hands slipping into the too big pockets of his too-big pants. The apple he had held in his hand joins the five others he had stashed away. One wonders how the Amity had managed to get all those apples in his pants without them sliding halfway down his legs with the weight of them.

"Sure. They're serving sandwiches again, though. Know you don't like those." Jonathan nods his head in the direction of the cafeteria. The slap of his flip-flops against the tiled hallway echos through the long hallway as he heads towards the lunchroom.

Steve did hate those sandwiches. They were soggy and disgusting and bland, nothing like the food he had at home. His parents were partial to spicy, interesting foods. He grew up on curries and wings soaked

in sauce. This was not the norm. Something he had only found out about one night when Nancy and himself had talked about what they had for dinner that night.

“The sandwiches are good! You’re just upset because your parents spoil you!” Nancy exclaims, her heels clicking much like Steve’s shoes did as she hurries to catch up. The girl was a good few inches shorter than Steve with her heels on. Jonathan was taller than Steve, so the girl was out of luck whenever the trio walked side by side. She caught up nonetheless with a glare to match her tone of voice. “Some people don’t even get food. You should be grateful for what you have.”

“That is different, Nancy.” Steve looks down at the girl walking beside him. Her blue eyes stare wide and wondering up at him. The shine of the sun from the window on the wall makes them sparkle. It takes his breath away. “Your parents starve you to make you appreciate any food you get.”

“I am not starved, Steve Harrington.”

“Yes, you are, Nancy Wheeler.” Jonathan bumps into the girl’s other side with an easy smirk pulling at his lips. She had already turned her attention away. Those pretty blue eyes were on Jonathan, all happy with the amity. Steve watches them for a moment. They were in love. He looks away when the burn of jealousy threatens to spill out of his throat.

Steve had kissed Nancy, a long time ago. Hell, he had held her down and made love to her. They had been in love. So in love. Not even their factions could keep them from one another. He remembers sneaking secret kisses in the hallways and holding her in the shadows of the streets. Their parents had even turned a blind eye to the two when they snuck in each other’s windows. For a long time, it had been Steve and Nancy against the world. They were going to go to the same faction and have a small family and live happily ever after.

That was a long time ago.

Steve tunes the rest of their conversation out. It was a lot of laughs and smiles, something Steve wishes he could be a part of, but unable

to face the two when they joke back and forth like that. Jonathan hadn't even been a part of his life before the two of them had met. Then, of course, the loser Steve Harrington had no other friends to turn to except his ex and her new boyfriend. Pitiful, he had to admit. Especially when he was still in love with the girl walking beside him.

The lunchroom is one of the largest rooms in the whole school. As soon as one walks in they see rows and rows of tables, all sitting children ages ten to eighteen. One side of the room houses a large window spreading from one wall to the other. It overlooks the courtyard right outside of the school and, in the afternoon, the setting sun sends strands of golden light through the window. The light illuminates the room, makes it glow a nice orange shade. Steve had been there during that time on multiple occasions and hadn't gotten bored of the idea yet.

Nancy and Jonathan walk a little ways ahead of Steve as they enter the lunchroom. Their chatter continues to escape Steve's attention, even if they had moved onto more important topics he should take part in. He refused to think about what was going to happen tomorrow and the next day. For right now he was Steve Harrington, a shitty Erudite teenager who scraped by in school. Nothing else mattered.

Brown eyes scan over the large room. Down the middle of the room, there was notable. That is where teachers patrolled and students got their lunches, so the tables had been placed around the makeshift lunch line area. As per usual, the factions split themselves into cliches.

A sea of blue sat at one of the long tables. Most of them had books in their hands, their lunches to the side and uneaten for the most part. Some bent their heads over the same book. Steve had to guess they were discussing some major plot point or whatever odd fact it was covering.

Beside them were the Amity. That particular faction chose to sit in a circle on the floor, forgoing any tables around them. They sat cross-legged, some with small drums or stringed instruments, and sang amongst themselves. Laughter flows from the area in waves. Some of the younger children run around the circle pushing and shoving each

other to get ahead.

Across the lunchroom was the abnegation. The faction had smushed themselves along the walls furthest away from the door. Sandwiches sat half eaten in their hands, their mouths sewn shut to avoid small talk. Eyes shift around the lunchroom; never speaking, never commenting. They were but a shadow amongst the room. Always the last to arrive and the last to leave. This was, of course, because they stayed in any room the school had them in to clean up messes left by the other factions. 'Leave the place better than you found it' was their motto of sorts.

Dauntless had pushed two tables together to fit their whole faction. They were all black, shaved hair and cigarettes hanging from their lips. Cigarettes they rolled themselves and smoke they blow into any passerby's face. Today it seemed they had brought a few packs of cards from their faction house. Sandwiches they wouldn't eat anyway were thrown on the table as a means of gambling. Shouts and cries of victory rose above any other factions mumbling from any other table. Every so often one of the teens would slam their hand on the table, sending a sandwich or two flying across the room.

Candor had taken the middlemost tables. They were stuck in a debate over one thing or another, as they often were. Their sleek suits and pristine hair stuck out from other factions, who were less strict about the types of clothing their children could wear. This faction looked almost like a business gathering. Each one wearing the same uniform and speaking in voices that commanded respect. If one were to step too close they would hear rather harsh words leave the faction members' mouths. However, Steve had gotten used to these sorts of things from candor. Their truth was often harsh and sour on the tongue.

Smaller tables around the room held a few mixed groups such as Steve's ragtag group. Children were not held to as high a standard as true faction members. As a result, a few brave children would intermingle with children from other factions. It wasn't common, per se, but not looked down upon as it had been a few years ago. Most of the time the groups of kids that hung around together when they were small end up choosing the same faction in the end, anyway. That is how the chip falls.

Nancy and Steve had met a long time ago, and their friendship had developed over the course of a few years. Both were loners for their reasons. Neither of them fit in with their designated faction. It was inevitable that they would stick by each other, especially after their parents hung around each other during one of those fancy dinners Steve always found himself at. What set their friendship in stone was when Steve offered Nancy one of his many unread books. Nancy's face had lit up in delight. Ever since that day the two had been inseparable. Steve often enlisted Nancy's help with school and Nancy enlisted Steve's help in having fun. The two made a great pair.

And they still do. Steve takes the plate Nancy herself hands to him. Her smile was soft and caring as she did, yet it held a certain level of threat unknown to others of abnegation. Steve nods to the shorter woman as he takes the hard tray. Grey bread and white cheese stare up at him as he eyes it. The only thing with color on the plate was an apple Jonathan sits there. Milk and beans don't make for much of a side order. All in all lunches like this make Steve miss his mother's cooking.

"You will eat it." Nancy gives him a pointed look as the three sit down together at their designated table. It was located between the abnegation and amity groups, something Nancy had insisted on because of her little brother. She could keep a keen eye on Mike from here. It also meant listening to Amity's off-key harmonies. "I don't care what you say. I know you didn't eat breakfast and you are not waiting until dinner to eat."

"Come on Nancy. I'll get food poisoning." Steve complains, picking up the bread from the cheese. It was damp enough to break apart as he lifted it. Bile rises in his throat as he wipes the remaining bread particles on the edge of his tray. "That is disgusting."

"And it is food." Nancy picks up her sandwich and takes a bite of it. Her face scrunches up at the disappointing taste mixed with horrendous texture. Nevertheless, the abnegation stares Steve right in the eye as she swallows the whole thing. Jonathan bites down on another one of his apples to her left. "See? Not so bad."

"It is that bad." Jonathan snorts from beside her. His sandwich laid untouched on his plate, but, of course, Nancy never got onto him for

not eating (something Steve noticed with a stab of jealousy). "It tastes like a dirty sock."

"Accurate." Steve chimes, his eyes dropping to the bread once again. The cheese had slid halfway off the sandwich by now. It laid in a puddle on the plastic tray, promising to give stomach issues to anyone brave enough to eat the whole sandwich.

Jonathan picks up his pitiful-looking sandwich, their eyes glued to it as it slips and falls to the tray with a small plop. Steve snorts at the sight. Jonothan joins him after a moment. Nancy glares at the two men sitting with her.

"You should eat food you are lucky enough to have." She snaps at the two of them as she eats more of her sandwich. Neither Jonothan nor Steve answers her, their eyes meeting across the table in a silent agreement. Both were not going to eat the sandwich and both would deal with any consequences from their friend for it. Jonathan tosses him another apple.

Steve catches the apple, his eyes scanning over the perfect red shade it had. Amity was known for their fresh produce, that much was true. Though, Jonathan was the only amity who carried around apples. They had asked about this once. Jonathan had shrugged and said his dad worked in the apple orchards. "Easy to steal when you work there." Thing is, both Nancy and Steve knew Jonothan didn't live with his dad. They hadn't pushed the subject too far, instead taking the apples and eating them without question. At least it was food.

"Steve watch out!" Nancy all but shouts. Her eyes get as wide as saucers as she leans forward. It makes both Jonothan and Steve jump.

"What the-" Steve winces at the feeling of something hitting the back of his head. He reaches up, feeling at the spot where a dull throb resonates. His fingers graze something warm and sticky woven into his hair. The wetness slides down onto his neck, sending shivers down his spine. Steve twists his body around to catch a glimpse of whoever had thrown the food at his head.

"Bullseye!" Billy Hargrove smirks from the table behind Steve's. His hair was free and flowing today, the blonde strands dangled over his

shoulders. He meets Steve's gaze and winks. "Right in the middle! Good catch, Harrington."

Billy Hargrove, better known as the Dauntless asshole. His father was one of the big guys in the faction. Like Steve's family name, it allowed Billy to get away with about everything under the sun without facing consequences. Where Steve used this to make friends outside of Erudite and keep them close, Billy tended to use it to mess with everybody else. He had gotten into various fights throughout his time in this school. Each one went unnoticed by the teachers and staff.

"What the fuck Hargrove!" Steve reaches for the back of his head, his fingers running through wet sludge. Familiar wet sludge. He pulls his hand away and grimaces at the off-white soggy bread that continues to disintegrate in his hold. Billy had thrown bread at his head. His hand curls around the substance, bits of it dribbling onto the table. Steve's jaw clenches hard enough to click. "You got it in my hair, you ass."

"Kinda the point." The Dauntless hums from behind him. Billy always looked so relaxed, even in situations such as this one. The kid could steal an Erudite book and walk out of the library with a cigarette between his teeth. "Don't want the little Erudite to go hungry, now do we?"

"Shut the hell up Hargrove."

"Big words for a little man," Billy pauses here, eyes growing wide. He shifts, body leaning forward for dramatic effect. When he speaks next, he pronounces each syllable slow and hard. "Harrington."

Something in Steve snapped, then. It was something about Billy, something that hung over every one of their conversations. Jonathan said he just had a punchable face, but Steve knew it was something more. Billy made Steve's blood boil. Every time. Without fail.

The two had been at each other's throats since Billy had shown up at this school, and that was no exaggeration. Billy Hargrove was an ass in Dauntless standards. Steve was an idiot with passion for Erudite standards. It was a sort of mesh of bad parts when put together. And

now there he sat, all leather pants and dashing smirk, his friends on either side of him like moths to a flame. Each taunts him in silence. Steve wants to cut them open and see them wilt.

“What’s wrong pretty boy, cat got your tongue?” Billy’s voice takes on that sing-song, gotta love me tone that does nothing but makes Steve’s face warm and his pulse quicken. How had Steve kept himself from fighting him for so long? His grip on the seat behind him was rock solid, hard enough that his knuckles ached from the grip. If only it was Billy’s face between his hands.

Tommy, a dauntless born that hangs around Billy every second of every day, bumps shoulders with him at the comment. A crackle rises from the kid, one echoed in the girl sitting on his other side. Carol, Steve thought that was her name, at least. Those three made for a vile pair of bullies since Billy had started playing top dog with the school hierarchy. Both Tommy and Carol give Steve expectant stares, their eyebrows raised and lips upturned in a smirk. Two more people Steve wouldn’t mind seeing thrown out a window.

He makes to stand when Billy throws his arms to either side, his smirk wide and inviting. Something about that arrogance flustered Steve. Maybe, so close to their ceremony, neither would get kicked from the school if they tussled. Steve had gotten so far as putting his hand on the cold tabletop when Nancy intervened.

“Steve, sit down.” Nancy’s cold hand wraps itself around his wrist. The gentle pull she did sends Steve back to his seat, eyes still glued to the three Dauntless laughing away at him. How he wanted to twist their faces up. “It is not worth it. Two more days and they will mean nothing.”

“They already mean nothing. Probably won’t even make it through initiation to their stupid faction, anyway.” Jonothan adds in support. He bends over the table to grab a bit of soggy bread from Steve’s shoulder. The food had started to soak through his blue shirt, darkening it into an ugly brown shade. Bits of it fly everywhere as Jonothan flicks it off his hand. “Don’t sink to their level of hatred.”

For a moment Steve contemplates his options. He was very well capable of standing right now and cracking a tray over Billy’s hand.

Not to mention how bright that option was, at the moment. The sense of achievement he would feel would outweigh any consequences. But, it was so close to the ceremony. If on the off chance he was in trouble, it would interfere with his entire future. Billy would be the reason he was stuck in Erudite. That thought alone made his skin feel cold. Goosebumps rose along the edges of his skin. Nancy was right. It wasn't worth risking his ceremony.

Steve meets Billy's gaze for another moment, feels the heat of his cheeks, and decides to ignore it. Like Nancy always recommended he do, he acknowledges his anger and turns his back to it. The steely blue eyes of Billy Hargrove turn into the bright baby blues of Nancy Wheeler. Her beaming smile makes his shoulders sag. No fighting Billy today, it seems.

A chime sounds above the room then, startling the room out of its stupor. Dauntless start packing their cards up as amity straps up their instruments. From behind them, a faint 'boo' echos from the trio of Dauntless.

"I am proud of you, Steve." Nancy pats his hand before standing herself. The sandwich that had once sat on her plate had vanished. She had eaten the whole thing. The thought alone made Steve's stomach turn. "Go. I have to help my faction clean up this mess."

Steve watches Nancy turn away from him, her hair, ever strict and straight, swaying as she moves. Formless, yes, yet she was pure beauty to him. And, for a moment, she was all he could see and notice. Nancy Wheeler; Abnegation. Steve's best friend for so long.

"Steve."

"Hm? Oh, sorry!" Steve jumps up, shaking his head to clear the thoughts out of his head. He wasn't that person anymore. Nancy wasn't his anymore. Nancy was Jonathan's.

Jonathan pats his shoulder. He had already made his way around the table and stood silent beside him. There was another apple in his hand, except this one was flickering between both of his hands. It was more of a habit than anything else. Steve had only noticed it recently. The closer it came to time for the ceremony, the more the

amity seemed to throw the thing around. It was the only evidence of his nerves about the next few days.

“Just one more class to go.” Jonothan starts as they walk through the halls. Students bustle here and there all around them, each trying to get somewhere in a hurry. They walk at a snails pace comparAllthe rest. All their grade — whom they passed here and there — seemed stuck in time. Their feet moved in a march towards their class, which they all shared today. It was a sort of dreaded destination for them all. Their last class before they joined their faction.

“Guess so.” Steve stuffs him in his pockets as they walk. The two boys fall silent, then, each contemplating what exactly this last class meant for them.

(Skip)

“As all of you are aware, this is your last day attending this school.” Their teacher was a kind woman, odd when you considered the bright blue colors of her dress. Somehow she seemed to make it work. The top of the dress -- tight as it was without anything else -- was laid over with a very thin mesh blouse. Her heels were short and wide, wedges like the one Nancy wears all the time. They didn’t click as the other Erudite women did. It was a lower, softer sound that didn’t bother the ears. Steve knew this well. His attention was often on the clicking of the other teachers’ heels or the small scratching sounds of a pencil against paper. It was hard for him to focus a lot of the time. This particular teacher’s style made it a little easier for him. “As such, I didn’t want to give you much to do on this day. I wanted to discuss the next few days’ events with a lot of you.

“You have all heard the speeches before. I will not repeat information you do not need or want to hear for the hundredth time.” Steve was thankful for this, as he was sure everyone else was. The class had fallen eerily silent when the teacher spoke. Even Billy Hargrove, who sat beside Steve, had straightened out of his bent stupor when tomorrow was mentioned. He hadn’t even picked at Steve in the last five minutes. Something was worrying him, for him not to care about Steve’s inferiority. “Tomorrow you will all be tested for your aptitude in each faction. Based on the results, the best faction for you will be selected. A lot of teenagers, I notice, worry about their results. I am

here to assure you that the test is never wrong.

“Faction comes before blood. It does not matter if you are an Amity into a Dauntless or an Erudite into a Abnegation.” This caused a hushed whisper through the room. Those pairs had been going at it on and off for the last few years. Steve’s parents have even talked bad about Nancy a time or two, something he had quickly shut down. Going from one faction to one with such tense relationships with the first was a controversial decision. Most that switch in times of tension end up factionless. It is a scary thought. “Your faction is your family. Do not listen to the stories you hear surrounding other’s failures. We as a society focus more on failures than we do successes. For every one story you hear about a factionless abnegation trying to make it in the Erudite faction there are hundreds of Erudite with a background in Abnegation.

“I tell you this for one reason and one reason only.” The teacher leans back against her desk. Her arms cross over her chest as she begins to speak again. Bits of her hair fall from the perfect bun she had put it in and fall around her face in a frame. “Trust the results of your aptitude test. It will bring you great joy.”

There was a pause in the room. It was a tangible thing one could cut with a knife. Jonothan turns around in search of something. Steve meets his eyes, expecting him to glaze right over him in search of Nancy. He does not. They stare at each other for a moment before breaking eye contact. Cold suddenly rushes through Steve’s being. What was that about? Did Jonothan know something Steve didn’t?

Or was Steve refusing to see what Jonothan did?

“Ultimately it is up to you to choose your faction at the choosing ceremony, held in the capital Erudite building the day after your aptitude test. I can not tell you how ot decide nor can I try and influence you to listen to me or anybody else.” The teacher seems to look at every single person as she speaks, her eyes looking right into the souls of her students. “You can choose a faction outside of your test. No one would know. The choice is yours. Just remember, you can only choose once. Those who are not successful in their original factions will not be given a second chance. They will become a part of the factionless.”

The factionless. It made Steve cringe to just think about that group, all bundles up in a mixture of clothes from different factions. Each one hungrier than the other. Images of them reaching for crumbs of food children drop or the abnegation give out whenever there is enough for them to share. Being factionless was worse than being disowned. It left a sour taste in Steve's stomach. The way his father talks about the factionless was enough to make Steve hate them.

Useless, the lot of them! All they do is steal our food and take our land, and that stupid abnegation lets them. I'd have them all shot dead if I could, you believe me. The last thing I want is a factionless anywhere near my family.

Steve's dad had said that after one too many beers, his tie undone and his feet thrown onto the table. His words had been shouted as Steve and his mother worked on dishes together. He had always dried them as his mother did the cleaning work. Then he would sit them perfectly on the rack to dry. His father had knocked that rack to the ground later that night.

"You're gonna be the dumbest Erudite I've ever seen." Steve's jaw clenches at the familiar tenor tone. He turns his head, meeting the smirk of none other than Billy Hargrove. Blue eyes shine with mischief and tease, scanning up and down Steve's figure. It made him uncomfortable. Steve found himself moving restlessly to get away from the steady gaze Billy had on him. It looked almost like a predator sizing up his prey. Steve felt as if he would get eaten up by that gaze and the boy it came from.

"And you'll be one of the cowards they call dauntless." Steve hisses his reply, glaring at Billy for a moment. His table partner takes one good, long look at him before laughing loudly. It draws the attention of a few students around them, who quickly avert their attention at the sight of the class bully. A sense of hopelessness threatens Steve, who has no one to back him up if Billy goes for his throat. Then he remembers the many times Billy has had the chance to punch him and hadn't. He was as scared of punching Steve as Steve was about punching him. For what reason he couldn't be sure.

"I have been through more than your pampered little ass could even imagine, Harrington." Billy throws his arm around the back of Steve's

chair. It brings him far, far too close for comfort. When he speaks again Steve can almost taste the sharpness of mint on his tongue. "Your daddy talks bad to you sometimes, right? Well, boohoo pretty boy. Some things are worse than a little bad mouthin'."

Steve and Billy stare at each other as the moments on. They seemed to be in their little world; big brown eyes staring into cold, harsh blues. Billy's eyes flicker downwards for a moment, just a moment, before returning to Steve's face. The temperature in the room skyrockets against Steve's cheeks. He can hear his heartbeat in his chest.

"Your face is too pretty for Dauntless." Billy suddenly whispers, and Steve finds himself frozen. Warmth radiates from the arm around his chair, soaking into his blue shirt and burning into his skin. Blue eyes watch him and he can feel his body heat up under the intensity of it. Even the tone Billy used, softer than Steve had ever heard it, leaves him flabbergasted as to what exactly Billy was about to say. "Do me a favor and stay where you are, sweetheart. Read a book or two, find some hot chick to fuck, and live your pretty ass life in the lap of luxury."

"I'd rather die than be in Erudite, and I'd rather die than be in the same faction as you." Steve tries to hiss out in his normal 'I hate Billy' fashion, but it loses its bite. Instead, the words are shaky and soft, unsure of themselves. Billy blinks, the moment shared between the two broken. The smirk he is well known for breaks across his lips.

"You, a dauntless? I'd fuck up that pretty face of yours." Billy flicks Steve's cheek, coming to pinch it between his thumb and forefinger afterward. "And enjoy it more than anything."

The dauntless moves away from Steve, then, leaning his back against the wooden chair the classroom had set up. When he places his hand down on the table one directly lands on the edge of his pencil. The thing sails into the air and hits Steve directly in the forehead.

The moment passed as soon as it had come. Snickers filter in Steve's ear from behind him, some of Billy's buddies, and Billy theatrically pat himself on the back for the show.

"Don't look so shocked, Harrington. After all, I am the prince of this school." Billy aims a wink in Steve's direction. His cheeks burn once more, the same feeling returning in his chest. How badly he wanted to punch Billy straight in the face. Instead, he kicks him in the shin hard enough to draw a grunt.

"You bitch!" Billy growls.

"Don't be a coward, Hargrove." Steve refuses to look at the dauntless again, his eyes lowering to meet Nancy's. Nancy was watching him with wide eyes, her lips pursed into a tight line. When she notices him watching her she shakes her head in disapproval.

Steve feels his pride -- which had swelled at Billy's sounds of pain -- wilt under Nancy's complaint. He looks down at his hands, laid perfectly clasped together on the surface of the table, and squeezes them hard enough to turn them white.

He couldn't promise Billy he wouldn't choose Erudite. Worst of all, he couldn't promise Nancy he wouldn't choose Dauntless, something she had scolded him for many times.

Don't be so violent. You're just like Billy and his buddies. Nancy crossed her arms over her chest as she spoke, her eyes narrowing in his direction. Steve had brushed her off as he always did. That didn't mean he didn't feel the dull ache of displeasure in his chest. He didn't ever want to disappoint Nancy. But isn't that what he's doing, fighting back against Billy as he always did.

Dauntless scared him. Erudite scared him even more. He guessed he would let the aptitude test decide. It would tell him who he was. Who he was supposed to be.

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

As the hours count down to his aptitude test, tensions begin to rise. First in his own home, where Steve finds something interesting hiding behind his father's work. Then, only minutes before Steve is to find out his own faction, there is trouble in Paradise -- Jonothan and Nancy paradise.

Notes for the Chapter:

Heyo! So yeah welcome to chapter 2. I do want to warn you there are mentions of abuse in this chapter and it will be a reoccurring theme so just be careful while reading! Other than that, I hope y'all enjoy!

Steve pushes open the door to his home with a heavy sigh. Nancy, Jonathan, and the kids -- Will, Dustin, Lucas, Max, Mike -- were walking to their own respective homes. The group waves to him as he breaks away, Nancy's soft smile highlighted among them. Dustin's high-powered wave was also another one of important note, as that kid was one of Steve's favorites.

"Be safe, Steve!" Nancy calls to him. Her hand lowers to grab at her necklace almost nervously, rubbing her thumb over the already worn metal like she always did when she was nervous for someone else. "Remember to do your homework!"

"There is no point in doing homework, right?" Mike jumps at the question, pushing through Dustin to get closer to his sister. "You all are getting tested tomorrow. Won't there not be enough time to even grade it after that?"

"Well, no, but--" Nancy stops herself from continuing with a wary eye in Steve's direction. Jonathan's gaze lingered on Steve for longer than it should. The two knew too much about Steve's homelife for his liking, but, well, he'd prefer someone know than no one. "Don't worry about it. It's none of your business anyway."

"I'll get it done," Steve calls out to the group more to calm Nancy than anything else. It seems to work somewhat as her hand falls from her necklace. "Promise."

"Be safe, Steve." Jonathan mirrors Nancy's words before starting on down the road. Will skips after him, as they had a lot longer to go than anyone else in the group. Walking home together meant the two of them often missed the car that normally took amity back to their home stations. Jonathan and Mike walked that road alongside a few other amity's about an hour after its departure.

The group migrates along with him, leaving only Dustin standing still in front of Steve's house. He seemed to be stuck in thought, eyes scanning over the house bigger than anything around in the neighborhood. A perk of having a dad so high up in the pyramid of Erudite, he supposed. Most of the time it just served as an inconvenience as people either made fun of him for it or avoided him in fear of his father. Nancy, Jonathan, and the kids were about the only ones who weren't scared of him by this point. Billy, of course, wasn't either; just Steve's luck.

"Dustin, dude. Go home. Max is going to leave you to walk those scary alleyways all by yourself." Steve leans back against the frame of the wall. The kid was dauntless, something that didn't fit him at all if you asked him, along with the newest addition to their little band of misfits, Max Hargrove. Dustin and Max got along well enough mostly because they spent a long time each day traversing the city back to their homes.

"Dude, I'll be fine." Dustin does the little snort thing he did when caught in a lie, arms going to cross over his chest. "I was just- don't be dumb, okay? Trust the test. None of us want to see you end up right back where you started."

Steve didn't even have the time to respond before Dustin was bounding off towards the ones he had fallen behind. His curls bounced along in the wind in a way that was cute, almost, for the kid. If Steve wasn't so flabbergasted by what had just been said to him he may have called out to him, asked for an explanation, asked how Dustin always seemed to know more about things than he should. The kid was gone, though, and Steve would only draw

unneeded attention to himself.

Didn't want to see him back where he started? What did he mean back where he started? Dustin didn't want him to be Erudite? To be honest, no one wanted Steve to be Erudite. It just didn't happen, normally. Hell, only Billy seemed to want him to stay where he was.

A flash of the scene from earlier entered his mind, adding depth to the facade he had always held Billy under. Why did Billy even care? Actually, why did Dustin care? The kid knew from the start of their shaky relationship that Steve was going to have to leave one day, so why was he so worried about it? This had been hanging over the group for the past month. Even Mike, the little brat that had always fought against Nancy every step of the way, clings to her hand as they walk home today. Will, too, hung close to Jonothan as they walk. It was like a cloud had fallen over the group. Steve was glad he was the first to leave.

He clears his throat and steps into the coldness of his house. The door slams shut behind him, a loud sound that echoes off of every pristine white wall that flashes when the automatic lights come on as soon as they sense motion inside the doors. Steve would have found it odd, his friends did when they came in, if not for growing up with the luxuries at his fingertips. Things like motion sensor lights and top-tier food were day-to-day for Steve and most Erudite; a fact that had always peeved Nancy.

Abnegation and Erudite had been at each other's throats for a while now, though, so a lot of the time Steve chalked up the annoyance to learned behavior. Hell, Nancy hadn't liked him for a portion of their freshmen year because of rising tensions between their factions. Their friendship -- and their love -- had broken that tense moment soon after it had formed, something both were greatly thankful for. Abnegation and Erudite were their parents' factions, not their own, they had decided that day. Since then no tensions of their parents had come between them nor Jonothan when he eventually joined the picture. It was an unsaid rule not to talk about faction tensions at the table.

Everything was white as Steve walked through his house. The walls were sleek and white. The floors were all marbled and polished every

other week. The furniture -- as minimal and leather as it all was -- was as white as the floor. Tables, chairs, lights, handles; all a medical white that hurt the eyes when you first opened your eyes. The only break from the white was the big ass windows built into almost every wall. The living room was the biggest. At the moment it was covered by a curtain as everyone was gone in the house, but, as Steve pulls it open to signify his return home, he is met with the sight of the fake neighborhood they had created for themselves. His house was by far the largest of everyone else's, and it sat highest up on a hill. Across from his house was another home similar in size to his own. Another student Steve had only seen in passing was doing exactly as he was; pulling open the curtains to their open windowed house. For a moment he watched the other in solidarity. He was a few years younger than Steve and, to Steve's knowledge, was in a lot better situation than Steve himself. The kid was one of those 'you know their faction' kind. The kid was twelve and already won trophy after trophy for his household. Steve had seen his parents, once. They were two women, all soft smiles and fluffy hair. One had ruffled the kid's hair as the other took their picture. The kid had done nothing but laugh and smile in the presence of his parents. For Steve, a kid who had always ducked behind the nearest table when his father entered the room, it was envious.

The kitchen was the worst place in the house if you asked Steve. He walked into the room and immediately felt his blood run cold. Then again, that was more because of memories in the room than the room itself. A plate of cookies sat covered on the island. Steve lifts the cover, takes one of the cookies, and bites into it. It was lemon. Steve hated lemon. He eats the rest of the cookie in a hurry as he heads for the fridge. Pictures of himself and his parents cover the surface of it, one of the only things that had any personality within the home. Most of the pictures were of his father with his halfhearted smirk and various trophies held out in front of his body like shields. His mother was, most of the time, off to the side with a faraway look in her eyes. Steve took up only two or three photos. One had him holding up a report card with all A's on it. In it, his eye was blackened and water was threatening to leak out of his eyes. The first time Steve had seen that picture he had thrown up only a few seconds after. Why had his dad chosen that one? The others were kinder, thankfully, with various second place and third place awards Steve always won. Even

if they weren't enough for his father, they were something.

There wasn't a single family picture here or anywhere in the house. Steve's dad didn't care much for family time or his family, for that matter, unless they got him what he wanted out of his day. The last time he had sat down and talked to his dad, actually talked to him, had to have been about four months ago when his grades had come back. Because that is all his father cared about when it came to Steve; how good are the grades. Keep his grades up and Steve gets to keep his life. If they drop, if they so much as slip into the lower A's, Steve loses everything.

Last year his father had thrown Nancy out of his house when he found Steve's report card. Steve had come into school the next day with a few bruises and cuts, something Nancy had been quick to question, but Steve couldn't even talk to her because he was watching his every move. His father cut him off from Nancy, Jonathan, even Billy and his gang. The power of the man scared Steve more than anybody else.

"Ham sandwich it is." Steve grabs the wrapped up half of breakfast his mother had left behind for him. He was sure the bread was soggy and the cheese was probably tasteless at this point. Food was food, he guessed. Better than the sandwich the school had served him in a mock of lunch. It proved to be much better, Steve notes as he takes the first bite.

Homework was next, something Steve really couldn't see himself getting done. He sits down, pulls out his materials, and tries -- he does -- to start working on it. The numbers seem to spiral into non-legible symbols and the words criss-cross into a jumble. Each time he writes something down he quickly finds out it's wrong. Homework was a no-go tonight, as he guessed before he even sat down. Sorry, Nance.

It was no use. Today was too much. Tomorrow made his mind shaky. Homework was a no-go. Really, what could his dad even do to him about it? The test required the utmost physical condition to complete and, the day after, he would be leaving for initiation anyway. His dad wouldn't be able to see him until visiting day per Erudites rules.

Because Steve was still trying to convince himself he was going to choose Erudite.

Steve sits at the dining room table for a long time. Long enough for the lights in the living room to flicker out, as well as the ones in the hallway and stairwell. Every room except the kitchen was clouded with darkness. He couldn't see the front door very well in the shadows of the setting sun. There were so many things we wanted to do, most of them revolving around getting his homework done, that he just couldn't bring himself to start.

His mother and father wouldn't be home until well into the night, so he wasn't too worried about his homework the longer the time clicked away. By the time they got home, he would be asleep or pretending to be. By the time he left for the aptitude test, they would be right back in their labs studying away whatever they were tasked with Steve never got to hear about.

A blinking white light caught Steve's attention. He looks in the direction of the light, catching sight of his father's computer left open in his study. It was one of those slim computers -- his dad called it a laptop once, explaining they had been popular before their world -- that was rare in their society. Wires and cables were connected to it to make it run faster. Now, though, it seemed, his father had gotten an email from a colleague. That wasn't too unheard of. His father was a big figure in the faction, he got emails all the time. What was odd was the fact that his father left his computer open in the first place.

Steve tries to push the thought from his mind. Snooping around his father's office wasn't ever a good idea. The man hated for Steve to so much as look at him the wrong way; what would he do if he found Steve snooping around in his secret Erudite files? Old bruises and scars seem to throb in his memory. Did he want to risk it just for a little itch of curiosity? Then again, how would his dad find out? He couldn't do anything to Steve without raising suspicion, either, as they did a physical examination the morning of the aptitude test. His father wouldn't dare push suspicion of child abuse on him.

It took about a minute for Steve to decide he was in a snooping kind of mood. He pushes out his chair, throws the blue jacket he had left on for whatever reason onto the dining room table, and slides across

the hallway to his dad's office. The door was propped open, another oddity that Steve found himself grateful for. That door was squeaky as hell when you pushed it open.

Lights flickered on overhead when he walked in. these lights were blue, softer for the eyes when he spent hours down here typing away on his computer. Steve found himself grateful, actually, for the dimmer light. Hacking into a computer in broad daylight was a lot scarier than logging into it in the dim blue light of Erudite. His father's chair was the same white leather as the couch. It was cold against his bare arms and clothed legs when he sat down, not that Steve paid much attention to the temperature when he had a computer in front of him.

Email from: Eric

Dauntless Compound

Subject: Divergent

Steve starts at the word. He highlights it with the mouse for a moment, mulling over where he had heard it before. It didn't seem to be much of a memory at all. After a moment he pushes the word aside in favor of reading the rest of the email.

Mr. Harrington,

As you are well aware, our forces are tracking down [Name removed]. When tested for aptitude, she showed a strikingly high aptitude for five of five factions, with lacking skills to only one, Erudite, believed to be due to a lack of education more due to circumstance than actual aptitude.

She is dangerous and has put two of our teams out of commission as of this day, [date removed]. We request your help in this manner. We need the means to capture the girl without harming her or any more of our officers.

We know of your project [CENSORED] and request access of use for a short duration. Of course, if you do not comply I will happily forward

the request to your superior.

Thanks for the help,
Eric

Steve clicks out of the email and marks it as unread, clicking the computer closed as soon as he was done. The lack of computer light did nothing to the room, but, somehow, it made Steve feel a little bit more uneasy than he had before.

He sits staring at the computer for a good full minute. His skin was antsy; something about the email had set him off. There was a need to know -- a curiosity -- and a thrill he wanted to seek in reading whatever else was on the computer. This could be his last chance to ever snoop, as well. Even if his dad would beat his ass if he ever found out.

Steve found himself caring less and less about what his father could do to him.

On a whim, he rebuts the computer. It was locked, now, as a safety measure, but Steve knew the password so it wasn't an issue. The small 'ding' of his father's profile unlocking was a relief to him. At least he hadn't changed his passwords out of paranoia.

There were a few programs Steve knew. One for the school system, which he helped head with one of his closest friends. One for communication with other Erudite leaders late at night. One for spying on Steve whenever his parents had to be away for an extended amount of time. Other than those, however, Steve was in the dark on the programs. He skimmed over the titles, reading through the useless note-taking apps until a file caught his eye.

Divergent

Simple enough to understand. Steve opens the program and it met with an already open note.

Subject Ten

Taken from home in Amity mainland after reports of defective aptitude testing. Test results show an aptitude for both Amity and Abnegation. 100% match for both factions.

Blood samples proved DNA's reversal into a more 'natural state. Weaker against infection. Has pre-existing medical issues that point to the accuracy of this finding.

Given samples of the [CENSORED]. Immediately showed signs of mutation and infection. Died within seven hours of initial injection with [CENSORED].

Conclusion: Divergent is not yet strong enough to be tested upon. Mind-altering drugs still do not work on them, leaving only the ability to alter their physique more than anything else. Lessen their intelligence and control them, in hopes of destroying the threat they pose us. More research is needed.

Steve blinks at the email, skimming over the words once more. Censored material was another normalcy for the work his father did. But, genetic? His father had once talked about his work briefly in a time of little thought. Genetic testing was looking down upon, he had said, and anyone who does it must be under the hand of evil. Genetics got us into this mess it will not get us out, he had spat to his mother one night with a glass of whiskey in his free hand.

For his dad to be doing genetic research something, or someone must have done some real convincing. And who was the girl? Divergent? The term rang in slight familiarity in his ears. Not even Nancy, the smartest girl he knew, had thrown that term out in any conversation between them before. So where had he heard it before?

"Divergent." Steve tests the words out on his tongue. It sounded big and bulky, new and foreign, but somehow fit when he rolled it around on his tongue enough. If the files were right, divergent individuals were dangerous. How? All this particular note seemed to say was because they can be part of two factions. Which is all but unheard of in Steve's education.

Everyone has one faction, one family. The idea of a person who didn't fit that understanding made his blood run cold. What could that person be capable of?

Steve closes the note and comes to a directory to others. At the top was a file simply labeled 'Divergent'. He clicks it open.

"We begin our study of divergent with the first recorded existence of one."

The audible voice startled Steve so much he jumped up in his seat. He flies his head around, looking for his father or his mother or someone who had caught him in the act. There was no one. Steve clicks the program closed and, in his haste, logs his father out of his profile once more. The screen clicks back to the home screen of the desktop. Steve's heart was racing.

His dad would kill him if he ever found out he snuck into his files like that.

Steve closes the computer, then, deciding one heart attack was good enough for him and, honestly, he didn't care enough to look into his father's falling morals.

One thing bugged him. The voice that had spoken in that video, well, it wasn't his fathers. It was too high, too brassy for that. It was the voice of a female; a female Steve knew all too well.

The woman talking in that video was Jeanine Matthews, leader of Erudite. His dad wasn't doing tests on Divergent.

Erudite was.

Whoever was in charge of designing the building the class was in need to learn a thing or two about comfort. The room Steve was being forced to wait in was about as uncomfortable and boring as rooms could come, and his parents were Erudite leaders. Steel walls, yes, steel, and the benches were about as hard as the walls looked.

Two rows sat pushed up against the edges of the hallway, tons of feet all tapping nervously against the cement ground as they waited in alphabetical order for their names to be called.

What did that mean for Steve? Well, not good things. One reason he hates his last name was his father, the other, however, was Billy Hargrove.

“So, pretty boy, what do you think you’ll get, hm?” Billy Hargrove purred into his ear from his left. The man was relentless, always throwing slick insults and oddly soft sentences when he least expected it. Of course, he was wearing his most revealing button-up shirt buttoned down about halfway down his stomach, too. How the dude wasn’t freezing his ass off by this point was a mystery to Steve. The words whispered paired with the warmth of bare skin against his own made Steve’s cheeks warm.

“Shut up Billy,” Steve mumbles under his breath. His eyes were glued in front of him, trained on Jonathan Byers back as he stands to go for his test. As per usual the man was dressed in colorful clothing that didn’t match his style at all. The bags under his eyes that were always present seemed to have deepened since just the day before. Steve found himself feeling sympathetic towards the man. Jonathan never slept. “Just. Just shut up.”

“No can do, Harrington. See, we’re stuck here for the next hour and a half alone, depending.” Billy leans forwards on his knees, following the attempts Steve makes to get away from him. “I say we use it as a last-ditch effort to get to know each other.”

The words sounded villainous on his tongue, dripping poison with each word. Billy was a predator; Steve was his prey. It sent cold chills down his spine. Steve didn’t appreciate the feeling very much. Billy didn’t seem to feel the same, as he let his hands graze Steve’s knee with little regard for personal space. Leather caught and scrapped against the smooth fabric of Steve’s dress pants. They were blue, as usual, and looked rather odd against the heavy black pitch of Billy’s gloves.

If Steve reached over and did the same to Billy he would touch bare skin. Slits the size of teeth were cut into Billy’s knees, something

Steve would say was style if he didn't know any better. Dauntless didn't do anything for style. Their pants were often washed out and cut up because of how much stuff they did to get them that way. Just this morning Steve had seen Billy take a tumble on gravel when he flew out of the train too quickly.

Yes. Dauntless got from point A to point B by jumping on and off of trains. Constantly. It was a theatrical performance with a lot of whoops and hollers, or at least that's how it seemed from the distance Steve watched it from. Dauntless teens were a lot scarier than most gave them credit for, and the drama of their arrival always drew the attention of envious factions. Steve was one of them. Who wouldn't admire the faction that didn't seem to have any rules? As Steve stood with his blazer buttoned all the way up and hair slicked back with copious amounts of gel his father forced him to wear, it wasn't hard to feel a little jealousy at the Dauntless. They could do whatever they wanted. Oh, how Steve wished he didn't have to listen to his father for once in his life.

Thoughts of his father have his mind whipping back to the computer he had found yesterday. Genetic testing on human subjects. Billy's faction was one of physical violence on all levels. Steve's was one of manipulation from the very top. How many people had they pulled for being "Divergent" without proving their harm to society? It was as disgusting to Steve as Dauntless antics. Dauntless antics he couldn't currently get away from. Dauntless antics he found more and more appealing with every passing day.

"Believe it or not, Billy, but I don't want to get to know you." Steve hisses out through his teeth. It was the truth; Billy Hargrove was one of those people Steve was happy he was leaving behind. The kid wouldn't worry him anymore after this. Billy would be gone from his mind, just gone, and it wouldn't concern him anymore.

"You're a bad liar." Billy hums, picking at the edges of his ripped jeans. Bits of fluff come off and fall to the floor silently. Steve's eyes follow them in a trance of sorts. "Remember when we first met? You seemed pretty interested in knowing me then, hm Harrington."

Steve's heart started at the memory. Of course, Billy would bring up their first meeting. He had walked into Steve's homeroom three years

ago and Steve had been struck by his beauty. Now, homosexuality was not disapproved of in any faction, though there were homophobic tendencies within a few. Erudite is known as the worst faction in that regard, with their belief in biology and science oftentimes outshining their feelings of love and affection towards everyone. Every other faction -- minus some squadrons of Dauntless -- were all in support of any marriage that didn't bring about more children. Food was scarce as is; the fewer children there was the less food needed to get everyone fed. It was a terrible thing, something most didn't like to think about. Steve's father had explained it to him multiple times before to defend his homophobic views. "Human lives are important" he would say to his wife. Yeah, important to the man who killed someone for being divergent. The whole thing left a sour taste in his mouth.

Harrington was the enemy here, not Steve. No, not even that. One man was not capable of that; Erudite was the enemy here. The hours Steve had laid in bed, eyes wide open in a panic while his father rustled around downstairs the night before were countless. This wasn't just him reading an interesting email and being afraid of the outcome. No; he was questioning his faction. His own family.

Erudite was as corrupt as his father had always painted Dauntless. As his father had always painted Abnegation. Perhaps all the cracks his father had seen in other factions were just to cover up his own twisted history? Steve worries at his bottom lip as he thinks over it.

Anyway, yes, Steve had been attracted to Billy when he first saw him, much to his father's disappointment it wasn't an uncommon occurrence for Steve. Steve liked men and women. That was something he had known since early high school.

Billy Hargrove? Was about every bisexual teenager's dream. Any teenager's dream who was remotely attracted to men. He walked in with perfectly curled blonde hair and a cigarette hanging unlit between swollen pink lips and Steve was gone. It didn't help that the teacher set Billy right beside him. The whole day Steve had breathed in nothing but the bitter taste of nicotine and the cool scent of leather.

The two had talked here and there. Steve had stared a little bit too

much. For a day or two, Billy seemed like he might not be so bad, unending teasing and pinching of Steve's cheeks aside. Then Billy had started hanging out with Tommy and Carol and, well, Steve had told everyone he hated Billy from the start. Half glances and pink cheeks beside, forgotten.

"Yeah? That was before I realized what a meathead you are." Steve looks up at the Dauntless beside him. His eyes were already boring into Steve, probably had been for the past few seconds.

"Oh? You're attracted to meatheads then, Harrington?" Billy's tongue flicks out to lick at his lips, eyes dropping lower and lower on Steve's body. It made him uncomfortable to the point he shifted in his seat, hip brushing against Billy's for a moment in his wiggling. "Didn't take you for the type."

"I'm not attracted to you-" Steve was cut off by a loud bang from the doorway. The group just called in had finished their aptitude test, it seemed, and Jonothan was the first out. His flip-flops slap against the floor as he rushes away from the room. Eyes glued to the man with too-white skin and what looked like bruises under his eyes.

Nancy was the first to stand; the first to abandon her post on the benches for her boyfriend. The two disappear behind the next door full seconds before the other testees. The click of her heels echos through the room as she rushes after Jonothan. The door the amity tore open didn't even have time to close before Nancy slipped out of it. A quiet "Jonothan!" reached Steve's ears as the door clicked closed.

Now, Jonathan was not as close of a friend as Nancy was to Steve, but that didn't mean he felt nothing towards the man. It was hard to see him struggle like that. Jonathan had always been so laid back, so go with the flow as is normal for Amity. To see him all wound up pushed Steve to action.

He pushes up off of the bench, eyes already glued on the last few puffs of Nancy's hair he could see. Even if he couldn't offer the same comfort as Nancy, at least he could show some support. A hand on his wrist stopped it. The pressure was enough for Steve to flinch. He slams his head around to glare at the offender.

“Wouldn’t do that if I were you.” Billy’s hold on Steve’s hand tightens slightly when he feels Steve pull away. “Don’t want anyone watching you too closely. Keep your head down, Harrington. Kids of the big guns always answer big time.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about, Billy.” Steve doesn’t so much as offer him a glance as he pulls his wrist away. The warmth of the dauntless leaves his skin feeling cold and chilly, a feeling Steve pushes back to the corner of his mind as he takes off after his friends. Billy says something in reply to him, but by the time he had said it the doors were already clicking closed between the two.

The hallway he was met with was somehow plainer than the one he was previously in. It was disconnected from the actual school, as serum testing had to be monitored heavily by Erudite officials to ensure nothing went south during procedures. As a result, the building was more of a warehouse setup with tall concrete walls and ugly ceiling wires and air ducts that oftentimes drowned out all surrounding sounds. As a result, Steve didn’t hear Nancy and Jonathan until he was right on top of them.

“I don’t want to be Abnegation, Nancy!” Jonathan’s broken voice echoes throughout the hallway. It causes Steve to falter, his eyebrows furrowing at the words. He falls back against the corner Nancy and Jonathan had hidden behind. The two wouldn’t see him, but he wouldn’t see them, either. Somehow he was glad for that. His inner turmoil wouldn’t help the situation at hand. Not to mention Jonathan’s slight dislike for Steve to know any of his business whatsoever.

“Jonathan it’s what you got on your aptitude te-”

“I don’t care about the stupid test!” Jonathan cries out once more. He sounded like he was ripping his hair out right about now. Steve wouldn’t put it past him. Abnegation was about the most boring faction you could get. “I know it’s always right and we are supposed to go with what it says but- but- I don’t want to. Not after knowing how your family is. Not knowing that you won’t pick it either.”

“Hush now, Jonathan. You know we can not disclose our results to each other. We aren’t even supposed to be discussing it right now.”

Steve looks over his shoulder for a moment, catching a slight blur of royal blue against the boring slate grey of the facility. He brushes it off as a random Erudite worker and keys in on his friend's conversation again. "I can not tell you what faction I will choose, Jonathan. I won't even tell you what I get in my aptitude test."

"Because of abnegation?" Jonathan laughs bitterly. It was a wet laugh, and, with a pang, Steve realizes Jonathan was actually crying. Crying over this test. "Nancy I don't want to be oppressed like that. I don't want to wear the same clothes as every other man and I don't want to be stuck helping the factionless and eating all the foods I don't like because I should or it's morally right or whatever the fuck your superiors tell you you should do."

There was silence for a few beats, and Steve could guess why. Nancy always faltered when her faction was mentioned in the negative. Even if she didn't fit in with them, which she didn't, hearing anyone speak badly about her faction always rubbed her the wrong way. She was also a hater of curse words, another abnegation thing. When she finally did speak Steve had to grit his teeth to hold in his surprise.

"Then. Then don't listen to it." There was an audible choked gasp from Jonathan and a distinct click of Nancy's heel against the tiled floor. "It's just a test, Jonathan. If our higher-ups think that one simple glitchy serum test is good enough to decide our entire future they are idiots. You are more than your aptitude."

"Nancy, I-"

"I love you, Jonathan Byers." Steve winces at that, his whole body cringing at the words Nancy could never say to him; never tried to say to him. It sent a pang of cold hard jealousy through his veins. Why was Jonathan any different than himself? Blood pumps against his eardrums hard enough for him to miss the next few lines shared between the two. He knows he should forget about it; knows it means little at a time like this. Teenage love interests shouldn't haunt him like this. It takes too long for his heart to calm, and, by the time he could hear again, it was all soft laughter and the clicking of heels as the two made their way down the hallway.

The room was colder when Steve returned to it. Steel walls, grey and

lifeless, push against him on all sides as he slides down into the bench. Billy perked up at his arrival, head lifting to offer him some off-handed comment. Whatever he was about to say seemed to catch his throat when he saw the expression on Steve's face. Steve curled down onto himself, eyes trained on the empty bench across from the hallway. There were only about three more groups before he would go. The door opened and three more kids walked out. Scratch that. Two more groups. Steve would feel more nervous if his heart wasn't currently shattering into a few million pieces.

"I love you, Jonathan Byers." The words kept ringing and echoing around in his head. Three little words. Three little words had such a hold over Steve right now. Why? This wasn't even relevant to his life at the moment. Nancy meant nothing, little, in the face of his test. So why was it all he could think about? Those three little words drowned out even the abnegation issue with Jonathan.

"She didn't deserve you, anyway." Was the first thing Billy vocalized. The words sent a spike of pain through Steve's body. Nancy was a sun; a star amongst the black night that had been Steve's life at the time. She hadn't ever said I love you to him. It diminished the value of their relationship drastically in the face of what he just heard. Steve didn't dignify Billy with a response, instead further curling into his form. Even the repulsive blue color of his blazer seemed dull after that interaction.

What was so wrong with Steve that Nancy couldn't love him? Was it his tendency to shut down when yelled at? Jonathan never did that. The kid tended to puff up and make a show of pushing the other person down. Steve would know; he'd been the other person countless times when Nancy and Jonathan had started dating. That particular development had made him an asshole for a few weeks. Was it his tendency to joke around with other Dauntless members too much? Steve knew Nancy hated all Dauntless youth. Was it his inability to figure out even the most simple math problem? Nancy was a better Erudite than Steve. What was it? Why hadn't Nancy ever favored him?

The next few minutes pass in much the same way; Steve moping over Nancy and Jonathan's relationship while Billy watched on with a downturned lip. By the time it was their turn, the person to Steve's

right popped up in anticipation, Steve was so far gone he had to be pushed back to reality. Billy's hand against his shoulder caused him to all but flinch.

"I told you not to talk to me!" Steve snapped at Billy. "What makes it look like-" Steve's claim is cut short by a glove-covered finger pressed against his lips. Billy removes it, grabs Steve's arm, and pulls him up to his feet. The Dauntless was strong; strong enough to have Steve stumbling forward with the force of the pull.

"Don't sass mouth me, Harrington. We're up." Billy hit his shoulder against Steve's harder than necessary as he passes; blue eyes laser-focused on the door ahead of them instead of Steve behind him. The portion of his arm Billy had just yanked him from burned like he had stuck it in the fire.

"Oh." Steve suddenly felt rather small as he pushed open the door. It was well oiled enough it didn't squeak as it opened. Inside was a hallway with three doors to the left. Outside of each one was an abnegation. Well, the last was an older Dauntless man. Billy Bee lined it for the second abnegation room. The girl before them had already taken the first.

That left the dauntless man as his designated person, he guessed. The hallway was longer than Steve would have liked. It felt like a march to his death if he was being honest, with Dauntless eyes staring uncaringly in his direction.

"Right in here, kid." The dauntless pushed open the door for Steve as he passed. He was an older man, probably in his forties at this time. His hair had already started to thin and turn grey, as well as recede on itself. His voice was kinder than other Dauntless officials he had heard. The clothes he wore, too, seemed to point to a softer personality. All the Dauntless Steve had seen on a day-to-day basis wore tight jeans, combat boots, and a shit ton of eyeliner that made them look as gothic as old-time vampires in the cheesy novels. This man had on nothing more than a black T-shirt and black jeans. His combat boots were still somehow less scary than the one' Billy and his crew wore. "Sit down on the chair."

The 'chair' was more of a medical table if Steve was being honest. He

didn't seem to have much of a choice in the matter, however, as it was the only thing in the room beside the Dauntless man and a monitor set on a table. Oh, and the syringes full of serum. How could Steve forget to mention those?

"This looks fancy," Steve comments as he sits down. The chair is covered by some sort of paper that crinkles as he lays down. Any movement -- even tiny adjustments -- make the paper further crinkle and fold. By the time he lies back in it as he's supposed to all he can see is the roof of the room. He turns his head to watch the Dauntless man. The man walks to the monitor and picks up the syringe. It doesn't look like he's one for conversation. "Um. My name's Steve. Steve--"

"Harrington. I know." The Dauntless man finishes for him. It has Steve clamping his mouth closed in embarrassment. Of course the man would know his name. He was assigned to give Steve a very important life-altering test. It would be stupid for him not to know his name. "But, since you're so kind as to start a conversation, the names Hopper."

"Hopper?" Steve raises a brow at the odd name. No first name? Odd.

"Yep." The man pops the 'p' in the word as he steps closer. "Now you may feel a little pinch. Just know it's normal and not to worry. The aptitude test will begin as soon as the serum enters your bloodstream."

Hopper tilts Steve's head back in the chair so the kid is staring at the ceiling again. And he was right; Steve felt the needle pinch his neck as it's injected into the muscle. Cold spreads from the injection site, a cold weight that makes his eyelids droop and threaten to close.

"Good luck, kid." This is the last thing Steve hears as he is dragged under the effects of the serum.